THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

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GAY PARENTS

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ANDROGYNOUS SEXUALITY

Reflections of a Gay

by FRANK SCOTT

AS I STOOD GAZING DOWN AT LYDIA'S FACE, FLUSHED AND PINCHED WITH THE INTENSE HEAT FROM WITHIN, THE FULL WEIGHT OF BEING SEPARATED FROM MY CHILDREN SETTLED ON ME.

ACROSS THE NATION and around the world, closet doors are opening. Gay people are "coming out" in increasing numbers, openly ackowledging their sexual orientation and striving to cope with the problems this may present. There are even signs of a real, if grudging, toleration on the part of society for a sexual minority which has been little understood and widely exploited. One aspect of this phenomenon which has been scarcely explored is the sudden explosion in numbers of gay women and men with children.

It is probably safe to say that there have always been gay parents. The difference today is in the number of parents who are openly admitting they are gay. Consequently, there is a new climate of attitude and activity which insists that being gay does not disqualify us from being responsible parents. Lesbian mothers, for example, have traditonally been denied custody of their children because their sexual preference makes them unfit mothers, or so the courts have decreed. Increasingly, gay women are refusing to submit to this defamation and are fighting for custody of their children. The battle has only begun, but there is as much significance in the fact that the battle is being fought as there will be in the victories which will be won.

My perspective as a gay father is shaped by the emotional realities of my situation, as well as by the legal technicalities. In our society, fathers, whether gay or straight, are rarely awarded custody of their children. A man who breaks the bonds of a heterosexual marriage and moves into the gay life automatically has two strikes against him as a parent. First, he's simply on the wrong side of the argument. His wife gets the children and he gets visiting rights and financial support payments. In addition, he is labeled the offender in the marital disintegration, by virtue of his sexual preference, and his parental relationship is called into question. The overriding fear seems to be that he will seduce his children, emotionally if not physically, into acceptance of homosexuality as a valid alternative. Gay is still a four-letter word.

Looking back over my experience, I can see how I set myself up to take a fall. I married my high school girlfriend when we finished college. We had been dating for over six years and it was the natural, expected next step. At that time I had not yet admitted to myself that I was a homosexual, although I realized there was something different about me. Naively, I assumed that marriage would solve the problem of my "queer" sexual interest. And so it seemed to — for awhile. Children began arriving with alarming regularity, however, and five years later I found myself the father of three beautiful little girls. I also found myself becoming increasingly involved with the gay life, nurtured in secrecy and guilt. By this time my marriage was beginning to fray around the edges. To complicate matters further, I was serving as pastor of a Baptist church and was constantly in fear of someone discovering my hidden life and exposing me to ridicule and shame.

Coming out of the turmoil of that period was my first decision as a gay parent: my children must never know. For the sake of the children (as well as for the sake of family, friends, church, etc.), I would conceal my sexual identity and would strive to hold together the tattered fragments of a marriage. In retrospect it was a decision which was both cowardly and unwise, but it was the best I could do at the time. Each day became a nightmare of desire and guilt, of conflict and fear. The marriage became a hollow shell, inhabited by two unhappy people who never dared name the something which had grown up between them, as fixed and solid as a wall.

In this beleagured conditon I endured for eight more years. Each year brought a growing acceptance of myself as a homosexual. Each year brought new burdens of guilt and fear of discovery. Each year brought additional problems to a marriage which was now one prolonged crisis. Each year brought new difficulties in balancing my two lifestyles and still finding time to spend with my children. My growing sense of failure as a parent colored all my experiences and trapped me in an emotional vise. My daughters were rapidly becoming the major casualities in my running battle with the world, the flesh, and myself.

The past ten months have brought many changes to my life. My wife and I separated, after acknowledging the futility of struggling to preserve a legal relationship which was meaningless. I resigned from my church and, after some months of drifting, found my way to MCC. I met a man and discovered the full impact of love and commitment in a gay lifestyle. And I rediscovered my children.

My daughters are Debbie, 12, Becky, 10, and Lydia, 7. They spend every Saturday with me and my lover. On occasion they sleep over, in their sleeping bags on the living room floor. Cliff and I try to make this quality time, since

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Frank Scott is Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church, Pittsburgh, Pa, where he formerly served churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Parent

the quantity is so limited. In a real sense we are both involved in being gay parents. We attempt to devise ways to make our time together interesting and yet together. In the past few weeks we have toured the zoo (twice!), ridden a ski lift, played on swings and explored a rocky river bank. Frequently on Saturday afternoons, we all cuddle on the floor and watch Tarzan movies on TV. Always they help prepare dinner and participate in the clean-up afterward. Typical after-dinner time finds Cliff sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor with Debbie and Becky playing Jacks (he can't get past foursies). I am reclining in a bean bag chair with Lydia, teasing and laughing and just being together. On this day we are a family for a few hours — for a few *hours.*

The end result of these moments of sharing has been a deepening of the relationship between the girls and myself. We are really in process of discovering each other as persons. This makes the time element even more difficult to cope with. Lydia has commented twice recently that Saturday is the shortest day of all. We try to compensate for this by visiting on the telephone several times a week. But the stark fact remains that our time together weekly may be measured in terms of minutes and hours.

Being a gay parent in this context has brought an anguish of the spirit which I would not have believed possible. For the first time I find myself truly on the sidelines of my childrens' lives — hearing second hand, being shut out, missing the joys and crises of daily life. Early in May, Lydia developed a dangerously high fever and was rushed to the hospital emergency room. I accidently heard about this just a short time after it occurred and I hurried over to the hospital myself. As I stood gazing down at Lydia's face, flushed and pinched with the intense heat from within, the full weight of being separated from my children settled on me. This time I was here, but what about next time? What about the cut fingers, the hurt feelings? What about the happy adventures I would be missing, or would hear about as an afterthought? What about Becky with her nightmares which brought her to me for

With this issue, The Gay Christian *reappears — now from its new editorial home in Hartford, Connecticut. And now an official publication of the Department of Publications of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.*

TGC is a journal of religious reflection for Gay Christians. We hope to stimulate discussion and inquiry on matters that make a difference for you and me. Some issues, like this one, will be potpourris of reflections out of the lives and thoughts of Christians facing the implications of Gay life. Other issues will be devoted to single topics. Such forums, we trust, will satisfy the broad theological spectrum represented by our readership — not by avoiding issues or fearing controversy — but by offering a balance of differing, significant *statements. TGC will be fair. And exciting.*

TCG hopes also to serve as a soundingboard for the theological exploration conducted by the Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order. FFO will be reporting regularly in these pages.

We invite your contributions. Articles will be selected for publication on the basis of quality: credible scholarship, adequate documentation, readable style, and relevance to the concerns of Gay Christians. An issue devoted to the charismatic movement within UFMCC is in preparation: we particularly solicit articles on that subject.

Without apology, we assert our publication is a most important one. We are, perforce, pioneers. Our unique call summons us to the cutting edge. The journey of the People of God leads us to where we have never been before, and we cannot be permitted to back seat. We must lead the way. That, I am sure, requires the best imagination we've got. It must engage all our sensibilities. Because the Spirit has not ceased to speak in the church.

We invite you to listen, and reflect, with TGC.

—fjd



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F. Jay Deacon, editor and layout

Editorial address: P O Box 514, Hartford, CT 06101

Subscription and advertising address: P O Box 36277, Los Angeles, CA 90036

comfort and protection against the terrors of the night? Suddenly I felt this sense of separation acutely and I turned aside to weep — for them, for me and for the nameless dread of the uncertain future.

One major result of the developing relationship with my children is that I have been forced to reconsider my decision about not telling them that I am gay. I first became aware of the new problem when Cliff and I found ourselves consciously avoiding a passing touch or a word of love out of fear of what the children might think. Somehow, being "out" is incomplete if I have to continue to hide from my children. Kids are so very perceptive; they pick up things which most adults would never notice. There is some evidence that they are beginning to pick up the fact that my relationship with Cliff is somehow different from just another friend. There have been passing comments, for example, about Daddy and Cliff sleeping in the same bed. After much thought and discussion, with Cliff and with a child psychologist, I decided that it was time to tell the kids about me.

This presented yet another dilemma: how to tell them? I prepared a nice little speech about the different kinds of love and how two men or two women can really love each other. Two difficulties have prevented my talking with them. One is my own fear. I am genuinely afraid of their reaction. After finding this new closeness, it is extremely threatening to think of facing some form of rejection if this information is too much for them to handle emotionally. Society has already begun its insidious brainwashing regarding "queers" and "fags." The second difficulty is that my wife is equally determined that the children will never know about their father's shameful (in her eyes) conduct. To date this remains an impasse. Eventually I must have this discussion with the girls, however painful or threatening it may be. If their mother refuses to yield at this point, then I shall have to risk it all and go it alone. Whatever happens, I strongly feel that there is no room in my relationship with them for the secrecy and sense of guilt which has haunted me most of my life.

My experience as a gay parent, facing the unique problems inherent in the role, is just beginning. Ahead of me lies that battery of questions which must inevitably arise from my attempt to be honest with my children. Ahead of me, no doubt, are problems of many kinds, as yet unknown but not unexpected. Ahead of me, too, lie experiences of sharing insights gathered from my gay lifestyle. I would not attempt to shape or influence my daughters in the area of their sexual preference, but I do intend to help them understand and accept the validity of the gay alternative.

It is difficult to generalize about the task and problems facing gay parents. Gay women face difficulties, legal and emotional, which are unique to their situation. Gay men, on the other hand, have their own set of problems as they strive to fulfill their parental responsibilities. The common denominator is that we are all striving to be the best possible parents to our children. We desire to guide them around some of the pitfalls which tripped us and we want to be present to bind up the wounds inflicted by life. We all face the question of whether or not to reveal ourselves to our children. In some degree, most of us face some form of alienation or separation from them, particularly in the case of broken marriage.

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF A LOVING, CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, GAY PARENTS CAN BUILD STRONG, MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

There is a growing need for ministry in this area of the gay community. As MCC moves to meet this need, a first step will be to assess the situation at the local level. Each pastor and worship coordinator should seek to be aware of the gay parents and gay family units in the congregation, as well as those in the gay community at large who might benefit from such ministry. If necessary, church leaders should educate themselves regarding the problems gay parents encounter. The church hopefully will become the focal point for counseling and referral. Accordingly there must be an awareness of community resources — agencies and individuals who are qualified to counsel in this area and are capable of dealing constructively within a gay context.

Another avenue of ministry might be through some kind of small group activity for gay parents. Led by the pastor or some other qualified person, this would function as a cross between a rap session and a consciousness-raising group. Here would be an opportunity for gay parents to share their experiences, their problems and possible solutions. It can be quite helpful at times just to have someone to talk with who really understands the pressures and potentials of your situation. The use of small groups need not be limited to large congregations. Wherever there are five or six persons who are interested in participating, this can be an effective tool of ministry.

There are some gay parents who are able to bring their children to church with them. Local MCC groups need to be sensitive to the needs of the children as well as their parents. Sunday school classes should be organized, even if only one child is involved. An activity of this nature will encourage other parents to bring their children with them. A bountiful ministry awaits us as we begin to look to this neglected area.

I am convinced that being a parent can be as great a blessing and as much a source of joy for a gay person as for a heterosexual person. It is unfortunate that, as in my case, the parental relationship for gays is generally involved with emotional trauma and legal difficulties. Beyond the problems however, or in spite of them, with the assistance of a loving, Christian fellowship, gay parents can build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with their children. This is one gay parent who is committed to that goal.

ANDROGYNOUS SEXUALITY

by PAUL BARSTOW

THE TOPIC I have been asked to address is bisexuality. I would prefer the notion of androgynous sexuality, or just sexuality unprefexed. But I suppose "bi-sexuality" is the word our current dialect is stuck with — supposedly occupying the undistributed middle, mediating between heterosexuality and homosexuality (each so designated as exclusive of the other, despite Kinsey's sliding scale). I would undertake a definition of "bisexuality" as the human condition of experiencing erotic attraction to men and women, or, expanding resonance, the capacity or propensity to love and/or desire sexual intimacy with other persons of both genders (note the "both" rather than "either").

Let me be specific at the start. A positive concept of bisexuality implicitly proposes, and I affirm, the positive values in human life of multiple and simultaneous loving relationships with a sexual component. And I would judge further that a positive concept of bisexuality implicitly declines, and projects as inferior in human value, exclusive or sequentially exclusive loving and/or sexual relationships confined to a single natural or conditioned gender alignment, whether heterosexual or homosexual. In these terms, I see bisexuality as a state of being persistently open to the possibility of sexual relationship with partners of either sex, the gender of the other person being a surely significant factor but not an over-riding one, perhaps more important than age, height, weight or hair color but, equally, perhaps less important than temperament, personality and character (as well as circumstances) in determining the force and degree of attraction to intimacy.

Dr. Barstow is a college teacher, director and actor, and was a founding member of MCC/Boston. The article was originally prepared for the Task Force on Human Sexuality of the Metropolitan Community Church of Boston.

Here I feel it necessary to pause and note a curious and disturbing phenomenon almost more prevalent in the gay subculture than in straight society: the assumption, even the dictum, that each individual must at some point in her/history, in or out of the closet, take a genderal-affection loyalty-oath. "The good gay is the exclusive gay," say many, even in the congregations of the Metropolitan Community Church; and the gay who does not totally shun heterosexual relationships is thought not one of the faithful but a betrayer of the cause. Androgynous sexuality refuses this limitation on the potential range and depth of ways in which persons of both sexes can be warm, tender, loving and giving to each other.

My advocacy of bisexuality, as I have earlier defined it, comes out of the context of a wider view of human sexuality. In one of his sermons at MCC-Boston the Rev. Jeffrey Pulling joked about my too frequent use of the expression, "It's Heaven!" when I like something. But I take seriously the Biblical assertion that in heaven (among those resurrected bodies) they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Human sexuality seems to me a natural and good thing, neither a fearful ogre to be kept at bay by enormous expenditure of psychic energy and moral fortitude, no, on the other hand, the highest and holiest mystery of life, death and human relationship. Rather than evil

THE PROJECTED AND CULTURALLY EXPERIENCED ANTI-SEXUALITY OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION IS AN INTOLERABLE BURDEN ON, AND A PRINCIPAL OBSTACLE TO, HEALTHY AND HAPPY ENJOYMENT OF THE SEXUAL ASPECT OF PERSONHOOD AND RELATIONSHIP IN OUR SOCIETY.

propensity or summum bonum, I regard sexuality as a force and potential within creatures which draws them powerfully towards others with the promise of a pleasure bond, whether in simple gratification of a neural itch or in

IT IS AN EVER-PRODUCTIVE SOURCE OF CONFLICT, PAIN AND LOSS, EXACERBATING EVERY GRIEF OF UNREQUITED LOVE, SEPARATION, DIVORCE, DEATH — EVERY RUPTURE OF RELATIONSHIP — AND CONFUSING AND CONFOUNDING MOST GENUINE INTERPERSONAL COMMITMENT.

the infinite complexities of a total intimacy. I hope it can be assumed and understood that the wider and more inclusive androgynous sexuality I advocate should exist or come into being under an ethic of loving responsibility for the well-being of the other.

If my premises about the nature of sexuality can be accepted, at least for argument's sake, I go on to posit that most of the difficulties and anxieties which beset various expressions of human sexuality are culturally and societally created. The corrolary is that some cultures and societies, both historical and contemporary, manage far better than others in creating and sustaining an ethos in which the sexual nature of personhood functions as an enhancement of human happiness and well-being. I further posit that the projected and culturally experienced anti-sexuality of the Judeo-Christian tradition is an intolerable burden on, and a principal obstacle to, healthy and happy enjoyment of the sexual aspect of personhood and relationship in our society today. It is this general problem to which the MCC-Boston task-force on human sexuality is addressing its sessions. And with this prefatory over-all view of the context, I return to the topic of bi-sexuality or androgynous sexuality.

It must be obvious that I accept the notions of Marcuse and Brown that the original and natural condition of the human being, still seen in infant and child, is what they have (perversely) called "polymorphus perverse." Sexual gratification is sought instinctively, but the ways in which that gratification is achieved are learned.

Our culture puts an enormous amount of social energy into programming for very strictly regulated channels of sexual gratification. Its projected ideal has been for each individual the discovery, in late adolescence, of

IT SEEMS TO BE THAT THE MONOSEXUAL IDEAL IN STRAIGHT CULTURE AND ITS MIRROR IMAGE IN GAY CULTURE BOTH REQUIRE ROLES AND ARE INHERENTLY SEXIST AND DIVISIVE.

a person of the opposite sex with whom, after a chaste courtship ritual, marriage allows a sexual relationship which should culminate in a host of grandchildren surrounding the deathbed of the still-constant loving couple. The manly man and womanly woman are to find in each other the perfect life-time partner who totally fulfills every allowed sexual need, along with most other needs of intimate relationship in a society where the nuclear family is very nearly the sole remaining source of community. Now I emphasize this tyrannous ideal (and recognize that some people achieve it and are blissfully contented by it — bless their hearts) because in our culture every other possibility of human sexual relationship is traditionally valued in terms of its approach to this model. For a single example, somewhat distant on the spectrum, conservative elements in the gay community hope for acceptance of homosexual marriage by the society because, except for the never-engendered children and grandchildren, the same image of fidelity till death is hopefully put forward for approval.

The baneful consequences of this radically limiting ideal seem to me everywhere apparent. It is, in my view, an ever-productive source of conflict, pain and loss, exacerbating every grief of unrequited love, separation, divorce, death — every rupture of relationship — and confusing and confounding most genuine interpersonal commitment. (And the poor, merely good little relationship is most likely to be ruptured precisely because it isn't that ideal. We throw away love at the first, fleeting glimpse of will-of-the-wisp true love.) The idolization of the model of a single, all-sufficient love/sex relationship stigmatizes every other possibility of relationship, homosexual or heterosexual, in marriage or outside marriage, life-long or temporary. Most of us are taught to torture ourselves daily with wondering where or how we went wrong because our lives don't fulfill this pattern the culture sets before us. Social misfits and sinners, we deny ourselves and others both simple joys and the complex foundations of happiness because by some cruel quirk of fate our love/sex sweepstake ticket didn't have this one right number, or we lost or misplaced the ticket.

SEXUAL LOVE CHANNELED ONLY TOWARD ONE SEX, WHICHEVER ONE, GRADUALLY CONSTITUTES A DENIAL OF WHOLE AND FULL PERSONHOOD TO THE OTHER GENDER, JUST AS IT DENIES FULL PERSONHOOD TO THE SELF BY TRUNCATING ITS POSSIBILITIES OF AFFECTIONAL RESPONSE.

It seems to me that the monosexual ideal in straight culture and its mirror image in gay culture both require roles and are inherently sexist and divisive. Jane and John, Jane and Jane or John and John are necessarily fulfilling role concepts in themselves and each other. The projected idea of the perfect match/mate dictates that each individual attempt to

possess, and attempt to project, role alignment in both sexual and non-sexual aspects of relationship. Successive possible interactions with other people of either sex, however happy, comfortable, supportive or fulfilling, are rejected or deliberately impoverished because they do not conform to this *soi disant* ultimate ideal. Anyone who has loved or been loved in this bondage must, I suppose, be conscious of the awesome total responsibility for another's sexual happiness projected and/or accepted in it. And so people try to play out each other's fantasies while preserving their own wistful dreams.

These role limitations of monosexuality are accepted conditioning at best, neurotic or psychotic at worst, but seldom correspondent to the reality of separate persons honestly responding to their own and the other's real and intricately varied needs and desires under particular circumstances and at specific times. And if they actually do so, once even an approximation of the ideal match/mate relationship has been found or pretended, the demon of jealousy is summoned as a proof of love. To possess the beloved entirely and exclusively is the goal set and applauded. The culture exalts jealousy — the fear, the humiliation, the degredation and the double or triple hatred (of self, rival and love-object) — this sickening emotion triggered by the frustration of the desire for total and exclusive possession is made a yardstick by which to measure love. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, I see the violation of love's most genuine imperative — the preference and pursuit of the good of the beloved above one's own.

Now if my stance is over-against all this programming, idealization, role-playing and jealous possessiveness, what am I standing for? I suppose I am an advocate of *openness* to loving relationship (including sex) whenever it is appropriate to the situations, needs and desires of the persons involved — productive of, or contributing to, their well-being, their happiness and their mutual fulfillment. I entirely agree with Marc Fasteau that there is "no logical stopping point in the progression from social intimacy to physical affection to sex." I see the possibility of an emerging culture in which the idolatry of sexuality is replaced by the humane consideration of sex as a channel of affirmation of the whole personhood of each partner, an extension to the bodies we inhabit of the concern and caring, the warmth and tenderness, the encounter with and exploration of each other, and the mutual, joyful self-giving which characterize both love and friendship when they are most like each other.

I am persuaded that this openness to sexual intimacy should extend to both genders as a natural bridge between our separateness and the constricting roles which have so consistently created hostilities, fears and anxieties. At the ends of all those idolatrized appendages and aperatures are persons — the proper use of the organs and orifices is satisfying to unite these persons rather than themselves. If what is sought and confirmed is a relationship of whole persons, the nature of body alignment is the means not the end. And let me add that in speaking of sexual relationship (bi- or mono-) I am concerned with far more — or should I say often less? — than genital interlock, of whatever sort.

THE IDOLIZATION OF THE MODEL OF A SINGLE, ALL-SUFFICIENT LOVE/SEX RELATIONSHIP STIGMATIZES EVERY OTHER POSSIBILITY OF RELATIONSHIP...

The ethics of the conduct of bi-sexual or multiple relationships is another subject for another article. For example: asked if, in the context of an I-Thou relationship, I encounter a person/lover whose concept of fidelity differs from mine in terms of exclusive-

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(From) EPIPSYCHIDION

I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths ... Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

ness, "What would you do?", I can only reply, "Weigh the possibility of changing my 'set' or genuinely convincing the other person to change her/his 'set,' or else avoid involvement to the hurt of the other. I suppose one tries to give off clear signals or return honest answers, taking responsibility for oneself and others in appropriate balance." I would invite another to embrace my viewpoint before embracing me. But I have no desire to impose my perspective, though, by the same token, I reject the imposition of another perspective on me. In adopting a principle we must accept the consequences of its acting-out. What I am fundamentally asserting is the positive legitimacy of bi-sexuality (and its concomitant of multiple and non-possessive/exclusive relationships) in an assumed context of situational ethics.

Manifestly, such views as mine come out of experience as well as reflection on that experience and on the report of others. I have been persuaded by my own experience that sexual love channeled only toward one sex, whichever one, gradually constitutes a denial of whole and full personhood to the other gender, just as it denies full personhood to the self by truncating its possibilities of affectional response. I regard sexuality as a marvelous agency for the knowledge of ourselves and others, as well as for the caring/sharing experience of genuine love in the infinite variety of its manifestations. To preclude or deny the possibility of a sexual manifestation of affection for another person is to limit the full dimensionality of possible relationship at the deepest levels of selfhood.

So I project a glimpsed vision of that heaven where we love each other, male, female and androgynous and share the gift and giving of our whole selves. And here and now I hope for a new community of persons who are loving and ready to love others whose loveliness is manifest to them. That loveliness is neither of the body (however beautifully male or female), nor of the mind (however brilliantly masculine or feminine), nor of the soul (however nobly manly or womanly), nor of any other single portion or aspect of the other self, but of the whole person, and such persons cannot only love their lovers but, *thank* HEAVEN, can want them to love each other.

I SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EMERGING CULTURE IN WHICH THE IDOLATRY OF SEXUALITY IS REPLACED BY THE HUMANE CONSIDERATION OF SEX AS A CHANNEL OF AFFIRMATION OF THE WHOLE PERSONHOOD OF EACH PARTNER, AN EXTENSION TO THE BODIES WE INHABIT, OF THE CONCERN AND CARING, THE WARMTH AND TENDERNESS, THE ENCOUNTER WITH AND EXPLORATION OF EACH OTHER, AND THE MUTUAL, JOYFUL SELF-GIVING WHICH CHARACTERIZE BOTH LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP WHEN THEY ARE MOST LIKE EACH OTHER.

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CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON JAMES H. CONE'S BLACK THEOLOGY FROM A GAY PERSPECTIVE

by HOWARD R. WELLS

MY INITIAL exposure to Black Theology occurred while I was in route, by car, from New York to Miami to attend the 1972 National Democratic Convention. Being deeply involved in the gay religious movement, I had suspected that black people's struggle for personhood had something essential to say to gay people as the latter started on that long road. So, prior to the trip, I picked up some reading material on Black Power, including James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation.* By the time I had reached Miami, I had practically devoured Cone's books and hardly touched the others. His theological approach to oppression affected me profoundly. It made explicit my own emerging feelings and thoughts regarding the nature of oppression; it clearly defined the place of the Christian gospel in the act of human liberation; it gave me, for the first time, an exciting sense of comradeship with other oppressed people, and it offered me very helpful insights into the dynamics of social struggle.

I agree completely with Cone's basic thesis that *Christianity can legitimately be the faith of only the oppressed.* The divine liberating act reflected in the Christ Event is a legacy that belongs exclusively to those who suffer the bonds of enslavement. At best, the oppressor can hear divine judgment against his sinfulness and the call to repentence by utterly rejecting his own *bona fides* and affirming, unconditionally, the humanity and "right to be" of the oppressed. For Cone, that means that "...white people must be prepared to deny themselves (whiteness), take up the cross (blackness) and follow Christ (black ghetto)...To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind and your body are where the dispossessed are."[1] God's liberating power has broken into human history through the Christ Event; the decisive victory over those principalities and powers that oppress human beings has been won, and it is only a matter of time before those who hold tight the chains of enslavement realize that they have already lost the battle and must let go.

Because salvation through the Christ Event belongs exclusively to the oppressed, the oppressor is in no position to say anything intelligent or accurate about the Christian faith, or specifically, about Black Theology, for the latter is essentially a response through thought and action by the liberated community of faith to the question, "What does the gospel of Jesus Christ have to say to black people who are struggling to survive in a white racist society that denies their claim to personhood?"

I find it interesting that I initially responded to Black Theology not so much as a judgment against my white skin but as a proclamation of my "right to be" as a gay person. In numerous places in Cone's books, I mentally struck out the word "black" and replaced it with the word "gay" and I heard the same message — God did not create human beings in order to be enslaved by their fellows, regardless whether they are black or gay. Perhaps more importantly, this juxposition of words enabled me to recognize important bonds of commonality between gays and blacks that I had never imagined.

In view of my complete agreement with Cone's basic theological perspective, I was confronted with a paradox — I found myself being an oppressor and one who is oppressed, not just by straights, but ironically by straights, some who are also black! I wondered whether I could legitimately reflect on or criticize Black Theology since I have white skin and therefore am an inheritor of an oppressor's tradition. That dilemma led me to consider how I define myself, i.e., who I am. I finally concluded that I regard myself, first and foremost, as a gay person. My value system and perception of reality arise out of that aspect of my being. In fact, I affirm my identity and "right to be" by affirming my gayness. Even Cone notes that in an oppressor-oppressed situation, the only way that the latter can maintain a sense of integrity and authentic identity is to "affirm the very characteristic which the oppressor ridicules,"[2] which for Cone is blackness.

The essence of theology is Jesus Christ. The sources of theology, i.e., the "stuff" out of which that essence is created in the lives of human beings is very often "the very stone which was rejected by the builder but which has become the head of the corner."[3] For blacks, the stone that was rejected by the world is the color of their skin, but it is through their blackness that they find Jesus Christ and consequently their human identity. Likewise,

Howard Wells is minister of Metropolitan Community Church, Brooklyn Heights. He is a student at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and a previous editor of THE GAY CHRISTIAN.

my gayness was the "stuff" out of which Jesus Christ was created in my life, and like blacks, it is that divine workmanship in my life by which I define who I am.

Therefore, because I am oppressed on the basis of an essential element of my humanity, and because one of the sources of Black Theology is the black experience which has elements of homophobia in it, I can legitimately embrace Black Theology as speaking to my experience of oppression on one hand, and on the other, criticize Black Theology where I recognize oppressive elements in it that deny my "right to be" as a gay person.

But I must always question the real motivation of my criticisms of Black Theology. Am I speaking as a *white oppressor* to blacks or as a *gay person* to blacks — who are simultaneously comrades — in oppression and my oppressors?

The reality of human beings simultaneously being oppressors and oppressed is not taken into consideration in Cone's theology. I regard this omission as a critical shortcoming. I hope to show how this omission has seriously compromised the integrity of his theological perspective:

(1) It leads to an inadequate eschatology in Cone's theology;
(2) It establishes an inflated identification with God's liberating act in Jesus Christ;
(3) It excludes black people from divine judgment, thereby denying them their humanity,
(4) It denies divine reconciliation and reconciliation among human beings an adequate place in Black Theology;
(5) It leads to a false sense of liberation and instead represents or calls for merely a redistribution of the existing power structure without radically changing or transforming its oppressive nature, and
(6) It rightfully exposes Cone's theology to the charge that it advocates a religion of blackness rather than a legitimate focusing of the Gospel on the black experience.

In preparation for consideration of the above charges, it is beneficial to review Cone's thoughts on eschatology, reconciliation and divine judgment and righteousness.

Black Eschatology

Cone regards an eschatology that is faithful to the Christ Event to be one in which the promise of God's liberation of the oppressed is brought to fruition. The oppressed participate in God's work to bring His kingdom to full realization by comparing the absurdity of the present — enslavement of the weak and poor — to the promise of the future — liberation from oppression, and on the basis of that inconsistency say "No!" to the tyranny of the world's principalities and powers. Cone notes that "...no eschatological perspective is sufficient which does not challenge the present order. If contemplation about the future distorts the present reality of injustice and reconciles the oppressed to unjust treatment committed against them, then it is unchristian and thus has nothing whatever to do with him who came to liberate us (blacks)."[4] Thus the eschatological emphasis of Black Theology affirms that the oppressed cannot reconcile themselves to the tyranny of the present, e.g., racism, that contradicts the promise of the Christ Event. Cone states that "...this is the key to Black Theology. It refuses to embrace any concept of God which makes black suffering the will of God...with a black perspective, eschatology comes to mean joining the world and making it what it ought to be."[5] Black eschatology also means affirmation of life for the oppressed after death, i.e., to affirm that those who die striving for freedom have not died in vain.

EVERY HUMAN BEING IS MARKED WITH THE SIN STAIN OF BEING AN OPPRESSOR. THERE EXISTS NO OPPRESSED PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT OPPRESSORS ALSO.

Divine Judgment and Righteousness in Black Theology

Cone notes that God's judgment is the unveiling of His righteousness in history, where the righteousness of God is His power to achieve victory for the oppressed; God reveals Himself by what He does in history, and according to Cone, "...what He does is always identical with the liberation of the poor from the injustice of the strong."[7] Thus heaven in Black Theology is an expression of black hope in the power of God's righteousness as it has been promised to be revealed in the future. Divine judgment is necessarily related to eschatology since "Christ himself will come to judge both the living and the dead, and all men will stand before his judgment seat."[8] Black Theology emphasizes that the oppressed have no reason to fear divine judgment as they are the sole inheritors of the salvation won on the Cross.

Reconciliation in Black Theology

Cone speaks of black-white reconciliation at any significant length only in *Black Theology and Black Power* and he is very pessimistic about its immediate possibility. He correctly notes that when whites speak of reconciliation, they are usually assuming that they will dictate the terms of that "new" relationship. Cone dismisses such assumptions as presumptuous and highly oppressive. Black people are not free if that means permission to buy into the white power structure, e.g., integration into white-ruled racist America. Reconciliation is a possibility only "...when white people are prepared to address black men as *black* men and not as some grease-painted form of white humanity. Black Theology will not respond positively to whites who insist on making blacks as white as possible by de-emphasizing their blackness and stressing the irrelevance of color while really living as racists. As long as whites live like *white* people (through marriage, schools, neighborhoods, power, etc.) black people must use blackness as the sole criterion for dialogue. Otherwise reconciliation will mean

black people living according to white rules and glorifying white values, being orderly and calm while others enact laws which will destroy them."[9] Biblical reconciliation means that due to the Christ Event, black people can now be what they were meant to be — creatures made for fellowship with God. And divine reconciliation between God and humankind can be reflected in black-white reconciliation only when whites renounce their whiteness and seek to identify themselves completely with "...those whom God has chosen. God has chosen black people."[10]

Now, I agree with Cone's contention that only the oppressed are the inheritors of the Christian promise of salvation, but who are these wholly "Oppressed Ones"? *Every human being is marked with the sin stain of being an oppressor*, because we all carry the onus of original sin; this sin stain in the black community is manifested, among other ways, in the form of gay oppression. There exists no oppressed person or people who are not oppressors also.

One will search Cone's theology in vain for his response to the problem of blacks simultaneously being oppressed and oppressors. Instead, he directs God's judgment solely against "whiteness." In doing so, Cone is effecting a great disservice to black people; he is in effect denying that they are human beings, for only animals and God stand outside of divine judgment, and he leads blacks into an unrealistic, inflated identification with God's liberating act in Jesus Christ.

By excluding black people from the possibility of being oppressors and thus exempt from divine judgment, Cone risks falling prey to his own statement that "...only oppressors can turn in upon themselves and worship their own projected image and define it as God."[11]

The basic crime of racism is that it has denied black people the right to speak their word — their truth — a truth that is surely more aligned with the spirit of the Christian gospel than can be heard in the utterances from white pulpits. But the black truth is not the Final Truth, i.e., the Word proclaimed in the Christ Event, because the black word emerges from the hearts and souls of black human beings who are not only promised liberation, but who are also subject to divine judgment for their oppression of others, e.g., gay people. Simply stated, black people are complete, full human beings, and therefore they are subject to sin and error just like other human beings. So when black artist Larry Neal asks, "What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors?",[12] the black Christian must in honesty reply, "The only truth I can express is the black truth, and to the extent that the black truth is the truth of the oppressed, it is God's Truth — the Final Truth."

CONE IS ELIMINATING THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF SALVATION HISTORY — RECONCILIATION, AND THEREFORE HE IS COURTING A FALSE SENSE OF LIBERATION THAT IS NOTHING MORE THAN ... A SHIFTING OF THE PECKING ORDER OF OPPRESSION.

Cone asserts that in order to escape the bonds of white racist oppression, it is necessary for black people to carve out new values that are independent of white "Christian" values.[13] This assertion is certainly in line with the biblical admonition to "Envy thou not the oppressor and choose none of his ways."[14] But the carving out of new values is to run the risk of establishing black "Christian" values in their place which will also be oppressive since such values will necessarily arise out of the black experience which is tainted with homophobic elements. In order to avoid substituting one oppressive value system for another, it is essential that Black Theology avoid the critical error of white values by including in itself God's right to say "No" to black values, i.e., bring black people under divine judgment. If this is not done, the black value system — no matter how noble or righteous its origins might be — will become demonic. As Paul Tillich correctly pointed out, when the finite claims to be infinite, i.e., stands outside of the possibility of coming under divine judgment, then it constitutes a form of idolatry and inevitably results in "existential disappointment."[15]

Cone's failure to include in his theology a place for divine judgment directed toward black people is also reflected in his inadequate eschatology. He is eloquent in his description of what black people are to be liberated *from*, but he fails to explore what they are to be liberated *for*.

One needs to review salvation history in order to appreciate its affirmative nature. Yahweh did not just liberate the children of Israel *from* Egyptian bondage because He felt sorry for them; rather, He liberated them *for* the purpose of being a light to all the nations, i.e., Israel's chosenness was to be the servant of God's wide-ranging historical purpose of redemption and reconciliation.

Salvation for a greater purpose than just relief from bondage was made even more explicit in the Christ Event; namely, we in the community of faith are saved from the tyranny of sin in order that we might proclaim God's reconciling and redeeming love to "...all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus Christ) have commanded you..."[16] Thus, divine liberation is always for a purpose, and the central theme in all manifestations of salvation history is that those who are liberated are called to serve as agents of reconciliation between God and humankind. Nowhere in Scripture is this more clearly stated than in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "All this (salvation) is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting

their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."[17]

In simply calling for liberation from oppression, Cone is eliminating the most important element from salvation history — reconciliation, and therefore he is courting a false sense of liberation that is nothing more than a redistribution of the existing power structure, a redistribution that does not essentially change or transform the oppressive nature of that structure. The only thing that is new is a shifting of the pecking order of oppression.

Despite Cone's assertion that "...Black Theology takes seriously God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ...among other things, this means that the wall of hostility is broken down between blacks and whites, making color irrelevant to man's essential nature...," one understandably wonders if Cone is serious. Indeed, one must ask of Cone, "On whose terms is reconciliation to be effected?" As long as he shuns the reality of blacks being subject to sin and error and thus coming under divine judgment, Cone must answer, "On black terms," since, as noted above, "God has chosen black people!"[18] In fact, Cone makes quite explicit blacks' exclusive claim on God's liberating power: "We (blacks) will not accept a God who is on everybody's side — which means that he loves everybody in spite of who they are, and is working (through the acceptable channels of society, of course) to reconcile all people to himself."[19]

So the question remains — what are black people being liberated for? We can only be sure that whatever the reason for their being a part of salvation history, its final goal is reconciliation — reconciliation on God's terms and God's alone.

Cone is correct in affirming that black people have every right to kill "the white thing" by any means necessary. There is no redeeming quality in white racism, and since white people have proven themselves unwilling and unable to eradicate racism from their value perspectives, black people must do it for them, even if it means engaging in physical violence. As patients do not prescribe the method of treatment to their physicians, whites are in no position to set the terms of black eradication of white racism. If whites want to participate in this purging process, Cone demands that they "...keep silent and take instructions from black people."[20] But where does divine judgment of black people enter into this scene? As blacks put a gun against the head of the white oppressor, knowing that they are indeed justified in pulling the trigger, they should notice the gun righteously aimed at their own heads by gay people. And so on down the line until at the end, one finds a divine gun aimed at all mankind. But one also finds a God whose hand of wrath is stayed because *He does love all people.*

How then are we who call ourselves Christian to live out this new relationship with God in an oppressor-oppressed environment? Are we to refrain from efforts to free ourselves from our oppressors for fear that what we do to our oppressors will be done to us by those who we oppress? Quite the contrary, the Christian gospel demands that we be even more aggressive in facing our oppressors head on and declare, "I'm not going to take any more of your shit!," knowing that in doing so, we are forcing our oppressor to relate to us as a "Thou" rather than an "It" and thereby participating in the effort to bring about the full realization of the kingdom of God.

But in the course of affirming our humanity by confronting our oppressors, we must simultaneously recognize that we are under conviction for our own role as oppressors.

James Cone's Black Theology is important because it correctly emphasizes the need for a well-defined diachotomy to exist before meaningful reconciliation can take place; each polarity has a right to stand on its own integrity, e.g., black people are not white people with black skins, and gay people are not straight people who go to bed with people of their own sex: "If integration means that each man meets the other on equal footing, with neither possessing the ability to assert the rightness of his style over the other, then mutual meaningful dialogue is possible."[22] Cone also notes that divine reconciliation is not merely a compromise of two warring polarities but something completely new: "Men were not created for separation, and color is not the essence of man's humanity."[23] Perhaps this is as close as Cone wants to move toward the notion of divine judgment of black people, the black experience and black values. Yet the need still exists for Black Theology to overcome the tempting lure of inflated identification with diety. If it cannot do that in the context of black-white reconciliation at this time, perhaps a more appropriate starting place would be to constructively deal with its own homophobia.

[1]Cone, James H. *Black Theology and Black Power.* New York: The Seabury Press. 1969. pp. 150-151. Unfortunately, Cone is guilty of blurring the distinction between the literal and symbolic meaning of the word "blackness" as will be shown in this paper.

[2]BTBP' p. 18

[3]Acts 4:11, RSV

[4]Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1970. p. 240.

[5]BTBP, pp. 124-126.

[6]BTL, p. 248.

[7]Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation.* New York: The Seabury Press. 1972. p. 102.

[8]Matthew 5:31, RSV

[9]BTBP, pp. 147-148.

[10]BTBP, p. 151.

[11]BTL, p. 234.

[12]BTBP, p. 132.

[13]BTBP, p. 127.

[14]Proverbs 3:31, KJV

[15]Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith.* New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1957. pp. 11-12.

[16]Matthew 28:19b-20a, RSV

[17]II Corinthians 5:18-20, RSV

[18]Note 10

[19]BTL, p. 131.

[20]BTL, p. 119.

[21]II Corinthians 5:21, RSV

[22]BTBP, p. 17.

[23]BTBP, p. 17.

Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

THE CELLMATE

March 1976

Michigan Officials Recognize Pastor Heather Anderson As Chaplain At State Prison

The Rev. Heather Anderson, MCC Chaplain of the Michigan State Prison at Jackson, has been recognized by prison and state corrections officials as a chaplain for the institution.

This major breakthrough at the world's largest walled prison was joyous news for Rev. Anderson and the 35 prisoners who call themselves her congregation. Hopefully it means an end to long waiting (as long as two hours) for visitor's passes for Heather, and an end to detention, threats, and other harrassment for the prisoners who have boldly chosen to identify themselves with MCC ministry.

Rev. Anderson, also co-pastor of MCC Detroit, has been visiting prisoners at Jackson, one to one, in the visiting room, for several months.

Rev. Anderson forwarded signed statements from 35 prisoners to prison officials. She sent xerox copies to the State Director of Corrections. She sent copies of all correspondence to the governor and interested legislators.

The next thing she heard was the the warden's office advised her they would study homosexuality, "researching" its causes, etc, etc. Heather was not to be put off by such delaying tactics. "Those prisoners are serious about being Christians," Heather said. "They want to know the Lord. Some have serious problems they want to talk over. They should not be denied this right."

Finally, toward the end of February, the warden's office agreed, after being contacted by the office of the state Director of Corrections, to recognize Rev. Anderson as a chaplain. This means she can go inside the walls. No more counseling in the visiting room where it is practically impossible to pray with the prisoners. She now can work inside, recognized as a professional minister.

Heather had sent the prison officials a copy of the decision of the federal court in California, stating that MCC is a bona fide church and that denial of prisoners' requests for the services of this church is a serious abridgement of their constitutional rights. The caution and careful checking of the prison officials is understandable in view of the number of spurious outfits which would pawn themselves off as churches for tax benefits and other personal gain. "It is to their credit that they recognized the seriousness and sincerity of the ministry of MCC," said Rev. Bud Bunce, National Chief of Chaplains.

For some prisoners, this has been a real test of their faith. The long-termers are impressed by the risks being taken by short termers in their behalf. One prisoner writes up a report of the discussions each week and shares it with all those who are not able to see Heather in the one to one discussions. Recently the warden's office called him in and asked him, "By what authority do you evangelize for this religion?" Without hesitation, the answer came back, "By authority of Jesus Christ."

It all started with Ken Brown. Some months ago, Ken, a prisoner at Jackson, wrote Rev. Dick Mickley, National Administrator of the Prison Ministry, telling him of the sincere interest of the Jackson prisoners and their urgent need to have MCC ministry. He immediately put them in touch with Reverends Wilson and Anderson, co-pastors of MCC Detroit, some 75 miles from Jackson.

"Ken Brown is the leader," asserts Heather, "and a beautiful person. He's dynamite. And sincere. They all want to grow as Christians."

Heather takes several members of the Detroit congregation with her to visit the prisoners. They have been undergoing an intensive training program. Heather discusses with them the material of *Handbook of Prison Ministry* as they prepare themselves for effective prison ministry.

"It now looks good to have worship services for the prisoners without going to court," Heather conjectured. If it does have to go to court, a friendly attorney has agreed to represent MCC at no cost to the church.

"Please pray for this ministry," Heather pleaded. "Please pray for those who are jeopardizing their parole and suffering harrassment so that they and others can have the full gospel, all the Good News, of Jesus."

Rev. Mickley, commented, "Of course, we are very thankful that MCC ministry is available for our brothers in Jackson. I think this goes to show that there are urgent needs all over this country. And the right person, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can get the job done. Heather was ready and willing and hard working. God is using her."



Rev. Heather Anderson strolls with Rev. Arthur Green.

Consciousness and Conscience

by Mary Lee Krueger

I had no idea what I was getting myself into by going to the Prison Ministry Workshop conference January 9-11. The conference hosted by MCC Indy, Indianapolis, of the Prison Ministry of UFMCC Great Lakes District was under the direction of Norm Flowers Area Representative for the Great Lakes District, and Bud Bunce, Chief of Chaplains.

My only previous contact with Prison Ministry was hearing about it from the pulpit during announcements.

But by Saturday night of the conference, what Prison Ministry means, hit me full force. I found myself coming to a new consciousness of what it means to be imprisoned.



There are people – real people – with names, lives, personalities, dreams in prisons across the country; some have been there 30 years and more, living in artificial situations; living in fear of their lives at times; often, kept in extra years because of a homosexual orientation. People caged in tiny cells, people who never see or hear from the outside world during their prison stay.

So it hit me and it began to eat at me, "Why should *I* be out walking around *free*, and not be involved in ministry to these people in prison. People desparate for just a little human contact. People needing someone to care about them. People deserving to be treated as humans, as other brothers and sisters, not as non-persons!"

Some are imprisoned simply because they are gay. There are people who long ago paid their debt to society and deserve a chance now to learn of their own self worth and some sort of self respect. There are people in prison needing and deserving ministry. They are an oppressed people, a people broken.

Were *we* not broken?

Did not MCC (for the first time for many of us) give us a chance to become whole? Are we not called out of ourselves to minister to these people; to share with them the very chance we had: to become whole?

I suggest you attend the Prison Ministry workshops planned here and at other MCC churches around the country. Seek to discover what you can do, either, directly involved with prisoners or on fund-raising activities.

Find out what Prison Ministry is really about. Find out what is happening to our brothers and sisters across the country who are incarcerated.

Attend workshops offered to you and raise your level of consciousness about this group of oppressed people.

But *do* find out for yourself. Because, and I repeat: No one is free until *everyone* is free. ■

(Reprinted from *The Shepherd's Staff*, Good Shepherd Parish, MCC Chicago, February 1976.)

Criminal Justice Task Force Seeks to Destroy S-1

by Dick Mickley

A major thrust of the Inter-religious Task Force on Criminal Justice is the total defeat of the 753 page rewrite of the U.S. criminal code, Senate Bill (S–1) now being considered by the Senate Juciciary Committee.

The repressive provisions of this bill would be a great set back to civil liberties and in the opinion of some experts would kill the Bill of Rights even in this bicentennial year of American freedom.

The criminal justice task force focused considerable attention on strategy to defeat the bill at its two day meeting in New York City, January 26-27. It was my privilege to represent the Board of Institutional Ministry and the Fellowship at this meeting. Rev. Joseph Gilbert, a member of the three person Board of Institutional Ministry, is a permanent member of the Task Force and will represent the Fellowship at the next meeting, April 6-7 in New York.

The task force, a sub group of the Joint Strategy and Action Committee (JSAC), is composed of national staff members and other delegates from many of the major denominations represented. These include: American Baptist, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, United Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, American Friends, Lutheran Church in America, Church of the Brethren, Unitarian-Universalist, as well as MCC.

A resolution was passed outlining the thrust of the Task Force's testimony before hearings of the Senate and House committees studying the bill.

The task force is joining in the effort to inform the public of the dreadful implications of the bill for American civil liberties. Spokespersons for the ACLU have commented that there is a very real possibility that this bill will be passed unless citizens of America are educated about its consequences and scream their opposition.

Its provisions are reminiscent of the Nixon and McCarthy eras and would set the stage for a virtual police state. Nixon-type government secrecy and immunity are sanctioned along with entrapment activities, longer prison sentences, prejudicial treatment of Native Americans (Indians), etc.

Readers of this magazine are urged to be leaders in the outcry against this bill.

In other action, the Task Force continued its study of strategy for the delay (moratorium) of prison construction. Testimony of Task Force members before Congress last year helped in stopping millions of dollars worth of federal prison construction. "The more prisons, the more prisoners needed to fill them." This slogan is so close to what happens and so alien to the spirit of criminal justice that the Task Force has focused much of its considerable power on the efforts for moratorium in prison construction.

The Task Force studied its strategy in the Attica and Kent State situations and heard a plea from Russell Means concerning the plight of American Indians, trying to obtain justice in courts which are "railroads to prison." He cited one jail in Rapid City, SD,

which on a typical day has 84 inmates: 82 Indians, 2 blacks, and little hope for justice.

I found it very eye-opening to be associated with national strategy makers. I was pleased that people of the caliber of these people are concerned enough about the people of America and their freedom that they would give tremendous amounts of their time, talent, and money for the furtherance of these causes.

I was glad to become better informed about these and other matters pertaining to criminal justice. I could not help but be aware that many of the people I was representing there happen to be members of a minority very often victims of the so-called criminal "justice" system in som of today's most blatant situations of harassment, persecution, unjust prosecution, and helpless deprivation of civil liberties. I made a resolution to keep better informed of matters pertaining to criminal justice and to encourage my brothers and sisters to take an interest in these matters which are so vital to the freedoms we would all like to enjoy.

I was welcomed with courtesy as an equal member of the Task Force. Many of the Task Force members spoke to me during breaks about the work and ministry of MCC. It was encouraging to receive the encouragement of these men and women, many of whom have high positions in their denominations. I thank God for the open minded, justice-minded people who have opened their meetings and hearts to MCC.



GOD NEEDS YOU

by Norm Flowers

"If you have not done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have not done it unto me."

The Universal Fellowship has a heritage that it can well be proud of. From its very founding by Rev. Troy Perry to this very day, UFMCC has made great strides as a Christian Church, overcoming impossible obstacles on sometimes nothing more than pure blind faith.

Yet too often we are content with boasting of the past. We stand in the present applauding the past until the future becomes the present and is lost in the same way.

In any church, including MCC, it is always a certain few who do all the work while the spectators boast about it. Usually it is the same few who serve on the committees, answer the phones, assist with publications, do the witnessing, help the office staff, and in general make MCC what it is today.

Some will say to this, "But I give a lot of money to the Church." Good! Money is also of importance, but it is not enough. It also takes time. "But I just don't have time." And they have a lot of excuses to prove it.

Well I sincerely wonder how anyone who hasn't got time for God and the Lord's work can expect God to have time for them. But that is an underestimation of our God. Even though we neglect God, God never neglects us.

However, God is in need of a lot more people to get involved. For example, the Prison Ministry of MCC has a very effective program developed and not enough people to set it in motion. Across the nation a dedicated few are trying to meet the needs of thousands of prisoners who have turned to MCC, and many are lucky if they even get an answer to their letter. If you were involved in the Prison Ministry, you would be able to write a lettter to a prisoner in the same amount of time that it has taken you to read this article, and thus make life a little more bearable for someone else.

You can tell me of all your commitments, of all your financial contributions, and of how you just don't have time. But it is not to me or anyone else to whom you have to explain. Tell your God. Tell God why you can't get involved. Tell God why you can't write a prisoner. Tell God of your great works. Then let God speak to you. You may find that you can add to both your commitment and your blessings. ■

FAITH IN ACTION

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Becky Lema has recently been appointed Area Representative in the Stockton, CA area. Becky is presently corresponding with prisoners in Vacaville and Atascadaro. She has worked with inmates at the Sacramento County Jail and she expects to be working soon for the Parole Division of the California Youth Authority. ■

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Sheldon Haight, Area Representative in the Seattle area, reports that the foundation is being laid for MCC Worship Services and gay rap groups inside the McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. They are also involved in bringing the Prison Ministry to the gay community at Washington State Prison by a Self Awareness Program and are attempting every possible effort to extend the ministry to women prisoners. The CELLMATE has also learned that Jerry Reno has been released and living in Seattle. Jerry has a lot of MCC friends who surely are rejoicing with him. ■

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Harlan Jacks is the new Area Representative for the Dallas area. He has worked closely with Steve Childers in the past and maintains a solid pen pal ministry to prisoners. The CELLMATE was also informed that Fr. Hoolihan and the Regional Director of the Federal Department of Corrections, Mr. Hewes, have recommended to the Legal Department that MCC be allowed into the institutions and they expect a March first decision. Rev. James Harris, Chaplain of the Segoville prison, recently met with the Texas State Chief of Chaplains to discuss MCC ministry. Steve Childers has recently moved out of state and we hope to hear more from him soon.



Norm Flowers Visits Fellowship Offices

Norm Flowers, District Representative of the Board of Prison Ministry in the Great Lakes District, spent two weeks in the Fellowship offices from February 20 to March 4.

Norm, who is a member of Good Shepherd Parish, MCC Chicago, is in California to confer with Revs. Mickley, Bunce, Vincent, Perry, and Sandmire and to learn more about the national prison ministry of this Fellowship.

During his visit, he is keeping busy in the Fellowship offices. The first job he was given was to serve as guest editor for this issue of CELLMATE.

"We are pleased," said Rev. Bunce, "to have this opportunity to get to know Norm better. I was very impressed by the work he did on the Prison Ministry Seminar in Indianapolis."

"I hate to see this two weeks come to an end," said Rev. Mickley. "Norm shows strong administrative ability and the work that has been accomplished in Chicago through his efforts speak well for this dedicated Christian worker."

NOTICE

Interest in the prison ministry is spreading and growing. The Board of Institutional Ministry is delighted to see this.

However, it is the policy of the Universal Fellowship of MCC that no person is authorized to contact any state or prison official in the name of MCC or regarding MCC prison ministry without specific authorization from the Board of Institutional Ministry.

All ministry in state and federal institutions is under the complete jurisdiction of the Board of Institutional ministry and must be authorized by that Board. All ministry in city and county jails is under the complete jurisdiction of the local MCC pastor.

Several instances have recently come to the attention of the Board regarding ministries and contacts in state and federal institutions which were not authorized by the Board. The Board wants to encourage ministry to as many prisons as possible. For the protection of the prisoners, for the authenticity of the ministry, for the sake of "good order," all ministry in the name of MCC must be launched with proper authorization. ■

THE BOARD OF INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY
Rev. Richard R. Mickley,
National Administrator
Rev. Bud Bunce
National Chief of Chaplains
Rev. Joseph Gilbert
National Advisor

Fred Knight Describes Prison Services

Fred Knight, resident coordinator of MCC services at the California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo, wrote that there were 80 persons in attendance at the most recent service, conducted by the Rev. Tere Roderick.

"This was our first service in our beautiful new meeting room. We had a lot of nice things going for us in this service. Inmate Patton sang a beautiful solo with Ken Mebs on the piano. Inmate McGray also gave a splendid performance with a reading about the Creation of the world.

"Rev. Tere Ann Roderick gave a beautiful sermon about God's love for all God's children. We enjoyed the service. Word is getting around now and some day I hope to see every one of 2000 prisoners here attending MCC.

"Many of us in here have no outside friends who write to us. I would like to send you names of only those who are sincerely interested in making Christian friendships. No games. It's very lonely in here, especially at mail call time."

"Our MCC committee officers are: Fred Knight, Coordinator; Vannoy Cleveland, Assistant Coordinator; Jerry Baldy, Secretary; Family Representatives are Joseph Patton, Donald Arnold, Terry Hand, Falka Garcia. The program artist is Billy DeWolf and the piano player is Jackie Hoffman.

"Everyone here has needed something to relate to for a long time. We want to thank you all for your concern for us here at the institution. We also want to thank you for including the CELLMATE in IN UNITY."

Fred's Address is: Fred Knight, B-56125; Box A-E, Room 1304; San Luis Obispo, CA 93409. ■

AREA REPRESENTATIVES

The following are Area Representatives of the Board of Institutional Ministry. They can be contacted by prisoners about any of the services offered by MCC Prison Ministry. MCC members who wish to know more about the work, or are interested in being a part of this ministry should write to the nearest Area Representative.

Rev. Heather Anderson, 13100 Woodward Ave., Highland Park, MI 48203

Rev. Bob Arthur, POB 14407, Omaha, NB 68114

Nick Cupo, POB 8174, Philadelphia, PA 19101

Arthur Fleschner, 2904 Concordia Ave., Tampa, FL 33609

Norm Flowers, POB 2392, Chicago, IL 60690

Rev. Howard Gaass, POB 1145, Baltimore, MD 21203

Rev. Joseph Gilbert, 63 Chapin Ave., Providence, RI 02909

Sheldon Haight, POB 12020, Seattle, WA 98112

Harlan Jacks, 3834 Ross Ave., Dallas, TX 75204

Steve LaFever, POB 187, Nashville, TN 37202

Ms. Becky Lema, 2606 N. Wilson Way, Stockton, CA 95205

James Lewey, POB 3147, St. Louis, MO 63130

Eddie Sue McMurtry, POB 291, Jacksonville, FL 32201

Gary Morris, POB 563, Akron, OH 44309

Terry Napier, POB 39235, Cincinnati, OH 45239

Rev. Jay Neely, POB 1757, New York, NY 10001

Bert Perkins, 11717 Victory Blvd, North Hollywood, CA 91606

Rev. Tere Roderick, 1076 Guerrero St., San Francisco, CA 94110

Ms. Mille Ternosky, POB 9536, Denver, CO 80209

Cliff Turpin, POB 7182, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Fred Wren, POB 5206, Kansas City, MO 64112

Gene Zurenda, POB 228, Escondido, CA 92025